

SEP public meeting in Wellington

Causes and consequences of the “war on terror”

Part 1

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On September 28, the World Socialist Web Site held a public meeting in Wellington, New Zealand entitled “Five years since September 11: Causes and consequences of the ‘war on terror’” (see “WSWS holds public meeting in Wellington, New Zealand”). The meeting was addressed by Nick Beams, Socialist Equality Party (Australia) national secretary, and John Braddock, New Zealand correspondent for the WSWS (see “The New Zealand Labour government and the ‘war on terror’”).

The following is the first part of Beams’s address to the meeting. Parts two and three will be published on Thursday and Friday respectively.

There is no question that September 11, 2001 marked a decisive turning point in both American and world politics. But, five years on, there remains no more important task than to clarify precisely what took place on that fateful day, and the political significance of all that has followed.

For the Bush administration and its supporters around the world, backed by an incessant media barrage, the significance of the events of that day is clear. They marked, it is claimed, the opening of a war not just against the United States but against Western civilisation itself—a war waged by Islamic fundamentalists on a jihad to destroy freedom and democracy as part of a global mission to impose their reactionary ideology over significant regions of the world.

Not since the rise of Nazi Germany, the claim goes on, has the world faced such a danger, as the jihadists plan and prepare new attacks. Moreover, the use of terror means that, in order to combat the enemy, new methods must be developed, both internationally and domestically. Such is the potential danger from nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction that pre-emptive strikes have to be launched wherever and whenever a potential threat emerges.

The precepts and principles that governed international relations in the post-war period, in particular national state sovereignty, must be overturned in this new era. Similarly legal principles, some of them established for centuries, including bans on the use of torture, the right to a fair trial, to name just two, must be suspended, if not completely done away with, in this “war on terror”.

Those who oppose such measures “just don’t get it” in the words of innumerable comments from the various well-paid media pundits. Not a day goes past without the public being told that September 11 “changed everything”. We need new methods. Civil and legal rights must be defended ... but the most important right of all is the right to life, and it is this that is under attack. The rights of the individual are certainly important, but the rights of the people, as represented by the government, stand over and above those of the individual and assume paramount importance. And so it goes on.

Our task is not only to subject these assertions to a critical examination,

but to lay bare the social forces they represent, to reveal the real political agenda of the “war on terror” and to derive the necessary political response.

One must note at the outset that for all its constant invocation, there is no event so shrouded in mystery and confusion as September 11. It has been said that we know everything about that day, except what actually happened. The so-called 9/11 Commission was nothing more than a cover-up, intended to prevent any real examination of what took place, and how it was allowed to happen. Let me refer to some of the facts which the 9/11 Commission attempted to conceal. These were detailed by the WSWS chairman David North in his report “Five years since 9/11: a political balance sheet”.

“To cite only a very few of the facts that expose the cover-up orchestrated by the 9/11 Commission:

“*The governments of Germany, Egypt, Russia and Israel gave the United States specific advance warnings of an impending attack using hijacked airplanes.

“*President Bush received a CIA briefing on August 6, 2001, five weeks before the attacks, warning that Al Qaeda might be planning to hijack airplanes. The briefing referred to the existence of Al Qaeda cells in California and New York.

“*The arrest of Zacarias Moussaoui in August 2001 placed at the disposal of the government information that could leave no doubt that a terrorist operation involving the hijacking of airplanes and their use as bombs was being set into operation. The Pan Am International Flight Academy in Minnesota informed the FBI of its concern that Moussaoui might be planning to hijack an airplane.

“*Mohamed Atta, who has been identified as a leader of the conspiracy, was monitored by the German police throughout 1999, and the FBI followed his movements in 2000. In January 2001, Atta was permitted to enter the United States even though his status as a student taking flying lessons—of which he informed immigration authorities—was in explicit violation of the terms of his tourist visa. The extraordinary ease with which Atta went about his work in the United States is summed up very well by writer Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed in his book, *The War on Truth*:

““In summary, despite being well known to authorities, Mohamed Atta seems to have led a rather charmed life...He had been under surveillance by US agents between January and May 2000 due to his suspicious purchase of large amounts of chemicals, which might be used to make explosives. In January 2001 he was detained by INS agents at Miami International Airport for 57 minutes due to previously overstaying a visa and failing to produce a proper visa to enter the US to train at a Florida flight school. But that did not stop him. Despite the FBI’s longstanding

concern that terrorists might be attending flight schools in the US, Atta was allowed to enroll in the Florida flight school. By April 2001, he was stopped by police for driving without a license. He failed to show up in court in May and a bench warrant was issued for his arrest. But that did not stop him either, because the warrant was never executed—although he was subsequently arrested for drunk driving on two more occasions. Throughout this period in the US, Atta never made any attempt to operate under an alias, traveling, living, and studying at the flight school under his real name. Stranger still, Atta was in regular email contact with current and former employees of major US defense contractors, as revealed by the regular email list of some 40 individuals he maintained, discovered by the FBI in September 2001. ...

“It is hard to interpret this sequence of events in a benign light. In short, it seems to be an unavoidable—if inexplicable—conclusion that the US government knowingly and repeatedly granted free passage to a confirmed terrorist to enter the United States and undergo flight training’ [Olive Branch Press, Northampton, Mass. 2005, pp. 205-06].

“*No less extraordinary than the VIP treatment extended by the US government to Atta was the hospitality it offered other 9/11 hijackers. Nawaf Alhazmi and Khalid Almidhar were known by the CIA to have attended a so-called “summit meeting” of Al Qaeda in January 2000. Their movements were tracked by the CIA for more than a year, but neither had any problem entering the United States. Almidhar returned to the United States with a multi-entry visa that was renewed in June 2001, although he had been linked to the October 2000 bombing of the USS Cole.

“*Another future participant in the 9/11 hijackings, Ziad Samir Jarrah, was detained for several hours for questioning on the explicit instructions of the US government when he arrived at Dubai International Airport on January 30, 2001. One must assume that this would not have occurred if the United States did not have serious reasons to be concerned about the activities of this individual. Despite this incident, Mr. Jarrah was able to enter the United States eight months later and enroll in a flight school.

“Based on the facts that have already been established, it is beyond question that Mohamed Atta and the other hijackers prepared for 9/11 under a protective umbrella provided by influential elements within the CIA and other intelligence agencies of the US government. Their unhindered movements in, out and around the United States would not have been possible had they not enjoyed the protection of powerful individuals within the state apparatus. The information that has come to light about their clumsy and even reckless behaviour while living in the United States, their carelessness in repeatedly drawing the attention of police, hardly suggests that Atta and his colleagues were master conspirators. They did everything but carry signs proclaiming their terrorist intentions. But it is evident that high-level ‘angels’ were looking after them.”

After citing these facts, David North noted that it did not take a particularly conspiratorial imagination to conclude that those who protected Atta and his associates knew they were planning a terrorist action that would be useful for their own policy objectives.

Before coming to those objectives, I would like to dwell a little on some of the issues raised in the series of speeches given by Bush and members of his administration on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of September 11. Over the past month or so, the US regime has introduced new arguments to justify the “war on terror.” Commenting in August on the supposed London-based airlines plot, Bush declared that “the nation is at war with Islamic fascists.”

But just who is supposed to represent so-called Islamofascism is rather difficult to determine. Does the term embrace the repressive Saudi Arabian regime—historically the longest-standing ally of the US in the Middle East—or those who are trying to overthrow it? Likewise, the regime of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt. And what of the Pervez Musharraf

government in Pakistan, which has just made an agreement with supporters of the Taliban in the northwest of the country? Is it about to slip back from being an ally in the “war on terror” to a supporter of fascists? Or consider Nouri Maliki’s puppet regime in Iraq, backed at present by the US. Does the fact that Shiite killer squads support it make it a fascist regime? Or will it only be designated as such when the US decides that it is no longer useful, citing, of course, its ties with the “Islamofascists” of the Iranian regime, and its refusal to denounce the Hezbollah “terrorists” in the Lebanon?

As for the Al Qaeda terrorist grouping, one must ask: at what point did they become fascists? After all, back in the 1980s, when they were fighting against the Soviet Union, with funds supplied by the US and the Saudi regime, they were, according to President Reagan, freedom fighters—just like those who took part in the American Revolution.

This new theme was picked up by Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in an address to the American Legion on August 30. The world, he claimed, faced a “new type of fascism” and warned that there should be no repeat of the pre-World War II mistake of appeasement.

According to Rumsfeld, the 1930s was “a time when a certain amount of cynicism and moral confusion set in among the Western democracies.” This led to appeasement and the failure to confront Hitler. It was apparent, he continued, that “many have still not learned history’s lessons.”

What are the real lessons of the 1930s? There was no confusion in the response to Hitler and the coming to power of the Nazis in Germany, but a fundamental class division. All over the world, the workers’ movement sought to combat the danger of fascism—its aggressive war aims and its bloody repression of the German working class. The ruling classes, on the other hand, embraced the policy of appeasement because of their recognition of the Nazis’ valuable political role.

From the outset, the Nazis’ rise to power was welcomed in high places. Let us recall the infamous article authored by Lord Rothemere, owner of the *Daily Mail* in Britain, published simultaneously in Britain and Germany on the occasion of the Nazis’ electoral breakthrough in September 1930, when their vote jumped from 800,000 to 6.4 million.

“If we examine more closely the shift in political power to the National Socialists,” Lord Rothemere wrote, “we find that it has all sorts of political advantages. For one thing, it erects a reinforced wall against Bolshevism. It eliminates the grave danger that the Soviet campaign against European civilisation would advance to Germany and thus achieve an impregnable position in the strategic centre of Europe. ... Enlightened opinion in England and France should therefore give the National Socialists full recognition for the services which they have performed in Western Europe. Under Hitler’s supervision, German youth is actually organised against the corruption of Communism. ... It would be the best thing for the welfare of Western civilisation if Germany were to have a government imbued with the same healthy principles by which Mussolini in the last eight years has renewed Italy” (cited in Konrad Heiden, *Der Fuehrer*, pp. 281-283).

And what of the United States? Here we need go no further than the case of US Senator Prescott Bush, grandfather of the US president, who was a director and shareholder of companies that reaped large profits from their dealings with one of the major financial backers of Hitler and the Nazis. Prescott Bush worked for the firm Brown Brothers Harriman, which acted as a US base for the German industrialist Fritz Thyssen, one of Hitler’s most significant big business backers. Bush was also director of the New York-based Union Banking Corporation, which represented Thyssen’s interests in the US, even after America entered the war.

As far as the imperialist powers were concerned, the Second World War was not a fight to end fascism—the fact that so many of the functionaries of the Nazi regime continued on in the German state after 1945 testifies to that. The other imperialist powers were more than willing to accommodate themselves to Nazism, and only came into conflict with it when the

imperialist ambitions of Hitler's regime conflicted with their own. It remains a fact that the US never declared war on Nazi Germany; rather it was Hitler who declared war on the US.

I raise these points about the historical record because the political—and, in the case of Bush, biological—descendants of the imperialist politicians who collaborated with the Nazis and who cast a jealous eye towards their methods of dealing with the working class, now proceed to give us lectures on the “new fascists” and their Islamic ideology.

To be continued



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